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## PORTRAYAL OF INDIAN RURAL SOCIETY AND PEASANT LIFE IN GODAAN

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### Abstract

Peasants are the prominent part of Indian economy as the Indian economy is agriculture-based. These peasants have always been neglected and their issues have been ignored. Years back, Premchand highlighted the peasants' issues and depicted Indian rural life realistically. He pointed out the rural population's problems, expectations and aspirations. The detailed study of the novel, Godan gives a deep insight of rural life. It exposes the forces of exploitation, highlights the victimization of the poor peasants and miserable condition of the farmers in Pre-independence era. A detailed study of Godaan brings out the fact that the condition of the farmers has not changed in Modern India. Thus, Premchand depicts the agony of the peasants that was common in British India. A critical analysis of Godaan can help us to understand the factors that have trapped the Indian peasant in the web of poverty, helplessness, deprivation, and distress.

**Keywords:** Social issues, Debt, Corruption, Exploitation, Illiteracy, Hypocrisy, Superstitions.

Premchand was associated with the Progressive Writers' Association. He was elected the president of P.W.A. in 1936 and his masterpiece Godan was also published in the same year. The PWA urged the writers to address social issue rather than write novels of fantasy and escapism. Writers were asked to deal with hunger, poverty, social degradation, and foreign domination using the civilization and culture of India as well as that of foreign countries for inspiration. Premchand followed these guidelines and his works can be seen as the examples and illustration for the doctrine of the PWA manifesto. Premchand's Godan is the real picture of the Indian society before independence. Godan depicts the social problems of our society. Prem Chand was a progressive writer so his aim was not only to present the plight of small farmers, but also to highlight the disparity between the rich and the poor, and the apathy or rather than antipathy of the haves against have notes. He himself writes:

“... gaining money was not the only purpose of an individual. It was also his duty to uplift the humanity and create high thinking in the minds of human beings. If these things had not been there, a man and a beast would have been equal. And the responsibility outgrows enormously in their cases particularly who were blessed with the pen and pen with the gift.”<sup>1</sup>

Godan deals with most of the social problems of India before independence. Our society was a victim of social evils as rigid caste system, poverty, hypocrisy, superstition and untouchability. The rich zamindars and money lenders were not only blind to the object conditions, in which small farmers were living but also took opportunity to rob them even of the last morsel of their bread. The priest class was befooling the poor and innocent people. Untouchables were denied of the human rights. They were considered inferior due to their birth so they were exploited by the people of upper caste. Premchand had sympathy for the downtrodden class of the Indian society. He could not become a communist because communism could not get roots in the soil of India in spite of the wide spread poverty all over the country. But socialism was certainly in his. He would change the through education and understanding, through love and social persuasion, instead a bloody revolution. Godan is a step in this direction. Premchand draws attention towards the miserable condition of the small farmers. They were poverty stricken, yet they were exploited by the zamindars and the money lenders. To the some extent their poverty was man made. Hori was a small farmer. In the opening chapter of Godan, he expressed his fear of Rai Saheb because he knew that several farmers had been thrown off their land because they had annoyed the Rai Saheb. He was in a hurry to go and appear before the Rai Saheb. He says:

"you know how many people here in the village have been thrown off their land or had their property taken away. When someone's heel is on our neck, it is best to keep licking his feet.”<sup>2</sup>



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20 Hori knew that he should appear before the zamindar, Rai Saheb lest he would get displeased with him. Hori was also burdened with debt. Premchand describes his condition: "He knew that there was no money at home, the loan from Bisesar Shah was still unpaid and rent of the land was due.

The zamindars exploited the poor farmers as Hori appeared before Rai Saheb, he was informed that the Rai Saheb had to scrape twenty thousand Rupees and his village had to contribute five hundred rupees. He was Seething with anger since he failed to surmise how this additional Payment would be made by the starving population. Premchand describes The moment:

"He picked up his stick and headed for home, tormented With the worry as to where the money could be raised for This special occasion,"<sup>3</sup>

Hori told revolting Gobar that he had to dance attendance upon the Zamindar to keep the zamindar in good cheer :

"One can not fight with the crocodile while living in Water"<sup>4</sup>

Premchand shows that a poor man was easily befooled and exploited. Hori was in need of monev. He decided to sell his bamboos at the rate of Twenty rupees for a hundred. But Hori asked Damri that he should tell his brothers that he has bought them at the rate of fifteen rupees to save five rupees in the bargain. But Damri cheated Hori , threatened and exploited him and actually paid fifteen rupees for a hundred. Rai Saheb the zamindar was also aware of the poverty of his tenants still he was part of the exploitative forces. He himself admits:

"It is ridiculous and disgraceful that a few people can make Thousands by governing and commanding those who can't Even get a crust of bread. I know very well how dissolute, how immoral, how dependent and how shameless we zamindars have become in these circumstances."<sup>5</sup>

The novelist wants to bring home the truth to the zamindars thatexploiting the poor people to live a life of luxury was not good for the zamindars themselves. It had deprived them from all the virtues and human emotions. Premchand describes Zamindar's mental situation .As:

"We are forced to plunder our tenants, if we don't give Expensive gifts to the officials, we are branded as traitors. If We don't live in luxury, we are called misers. At the slightest suggestion of progress, we start trembling and run to the authorities appealing for help. We no longer have any faith in ourselves or in our abilities. We are like spoon-fed babies ... but weak inside, debilitated and Impoverished. ... But I wish either the government or the laws should force us, Zamindars to surrender our selfish concerns."<sup>6</sup>

The farmers are exploited by money lenders also. They have to take loans on the high interest due to harsh circumstances. The Money lenders take advantage of their calamities and miserable situations. The interest amount is too high to get paid off. A peasant lives with debts and dies with debts but debts are still unpaid. The farmers can not stand against this exploitation due to illiteracy and helplessness. Gobar exposed the

villainy of Datadin, the village money lender Gobar says:

"From thirty rupees to two hundred in nine years! How Would it be? At the rate of one percent? He made much calculation on the ground with a chunk of pottery. In ten years it comes to thirty six rupees. Added to the principal that makes sixty six. We'll let you have seventy, I won't pay a coin more than that."<sup>7</sup>

These money-lenders befooled poor farmers. Further, they had their ways to take advantage of the helpless condition of the farmers. Jhinguri Singh explained:



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“If a farmer is badly in need, he’ll go on bended knees and Get elders to sign. In any case we’d deduct twenty five Percent”<sup>8</sup>

Premchand was greatly pained by this horrible state. He said very plainly: “As long as the government does not work some system of providing loan to the farmers, the law won’t have any effect on us. The British government never felt the necessity to help the farmers out of this morass.”<sup>9</sup>

Premchand’s *Godan* depicts the corruption in the Indian society. When Hori’s cow was killed, the village elders wanted to advance him a loan of thirty rupees to burden him with further loan. Then they imposed a fine of one hundred rupees on Hori and took away his entire crop, left him to starve, forced him to go to them for further loans. These money-lenders charged exorbitant rates and would make poor farmers their bonded slaves.

Prem Chand has also provided an in-depth study of the businessmen who would make money by hook or crook. Mr. Tankha, alawyer turned broker, was a real crook. He knew how to tempt a man into his trap. Premchand points out the corruption in Indian society:

“ Every around here considers the farmers fair game. He can hardly stay on in the village if he does not pay off the Patwari. If he does not satisfy the a petite of zamindars’s men, life is made impossible for him. The police chiefs and the constables act like sons in law, whenever they happen to pass through the village, the farmers are duty bound to entertain them royally and provide gifts and offerings lest they get the whole village arrested by filing a single report.

Someone ,the collector or other is always turning up the head record keeper or the revenue official or the deputy or the agent of or commissioner and the farmer is supposed to attend him on bending knees”<sup>10</sup>

The Brahmins who act as family priests also look for the opportunity to cheat the farmers and make money. These Brahmins would demand the toll in the name of God and heaven without any feeling of conscience.

Prem Chand has a dig at such Brahmins as he says:

“As a family priest, you can go to anyone’s door and come back with something in hand. You people get something whenever there’s a birth, whenever there’s a death, whenever there is a marriage, where there’s funeral you Work the field you land out money. You act as brokers. And If any one makes a mistake, you sent a fine and ransack his Place. With all that money your beliefs still aren’t full?”<sup>11</sup>

Premchand was very serious about the problem of untouchability. His world of the untouchables is poverty stricken and all the untouchables live below the poverty line. When Amarkant enters the hut of Saloni he sees as if poverty were crying thumping its hands upon the chest. In the same way. In *Godan* Siliya had to work hard for day and night, in the fields of her lover, Matadin, as a token of her love; but in response to that he is unprepared even to part with a single grain.

Premchand’s untouchables are extremely poor and below dignity instatus. They are not allowed entrance in the higher caste houses. In the story *Sadgati* cobblers, dhobis and pasis are not allowed to enter in a Hindu’s house. There is also prohibition on fetching water from a higher caste well, which is significant in the story *Thakur kaKuwan* and the bed-ridden Jhokuhad to drink the ditch water to quench his thirst. They are also prohibited from entering a Hindu temple, which is evident from his novel *Karmabhumi*. In *Karmabhumi* lower castes are not allowed to enter the temples of Thakurji.

To imprint the status of an untouchable on the reader’s mind, Premchand uses symbol of a dog in his story “*Dudhka Daam*’ where a man and a dog eat from the same leaf plate which symbolizes that man is considered equal to the beast due to his caste status. While in his another story ‘*Kajaki* to interpret the clutches of higher caste dogma he



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represents the struggle between a young innocent deer and a hound. The deer which falls prey to the hound, symbolizes the Pasi young man Kajaki.

Premchand's world of untouchable is poverty stricken. Poverty is separable in those cases where a man is not born untouchable or belong to a higher caste. Such a person can change his status from a poor man to rich one. But it is forbidden in the case of an untouchable by the canons of jurisprudence. No man can change his caste according to one will and there are separate canons for each caste in Hindu society.

Though no body is allowed to upgrade himself in this super imposed structure of caste system but if a man of higher caste commits any sin, he is downgraded. Premchand was in favour of widow marriage and inter caste marriage. Jhuniya was a young widow who got married to Hori's son, Gobar. The society in general Jhuniya's parents included, opposed widow marriage, but Hori and Dhania accepted Jhuniya as a wedded wife of their son, even though the marriage was not solemnized properly. It was a bold step and a lesson to the society. The novelist shamed persons like Bhola who wanted to get married again at a ripe age but would not allow their young widow daughters to marry again.

Premchand has given clear hint that he does not approve of the caste considerations which obstruct the marriage of the lovers. Silia was an untouchable girl while Matadin was a Brahmin. But they should get married if there is love between them. These were revolutionary ideas of Premchand. He wanted to give some new concepts of social relationships.

Premchand was against capitalistic exploitation. In *Godan* Chandra Prakash Khanna, Bank manager and sugar mill director represents the capitalistic forces. He cheats the poor farmers and makes money. He has no time for his wife and children. His mill caught fire, which burnt the whole investments. He was left broken, and friendless, but his wife gave him strength like an attending spirit. Govindi said to him:

“Why are you so disheartened? Because of wealth, the root of all evil? What happiness did that wealth bring us? Just one problem after another from morning till night, ruining our lives. The children dying to talk to you and you getting not even time to drop a line to your relatives”<sup>12</sup>

Premchand shows corruption deep rooted in Indian society. Even the editor Onkarnath who boasted of being the mentor and champion of the underdog was actually a hypocrite. He charged money from the Rai Saheb for keeping his lapses under carpet and also from the foreign firms to give place to their advertisement in his paper against his policy of swadeshi. He knew that he had the power to malign anybody, and was out to use this power of the press to entrap big cheese for money. Rai Saheb told him:

“Yes, I admit that on one or two occasions you have shown some manliness, but always with an eye to your own interests, not the public welfare. Now, don't start looking shocked and angry. Every campaign you have fought has had the same motive, the enhancement of your own prestige and power and income.”<sup>13</sup>

And as the Rai Saheb offered a bribe to him, he accepted the bribe with a smiling face. and said:

“The first transactions this morning brought in fifteen hundred rupees. I must have seen an auspicious face when I first woke up.”<sup>14</sup>

Premchand makes us aware of the evils of Indian society and social inequity. He exposes hypocrisy and falsehood of Indian society in *Godan* depicting the chaos of the feudal village but with strong belief in reformation. The characters of *Godan* are human even in the most inhuman conditions. British imperialism is behind the scenes, on stage there are mill owners, landlords, petty officials, priests, money lenders and one's own biradiri elders. Premchand is a visionary with strong belief in future transition of Indian society. He is a progressive writer and supports evolved society.



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